



March 3, 2021 **DRAFT**

MEETING MINUTES: Hamline Park 2021 Improvements – Virtual Public Open House

Attendees Monday - 3/1 at 12:00pm

Susan Walker
Victor Mister
Eily Marlow
Stacy Gillings
City Councilor Mitra Jalali
Alec Armon
Liz Hixson
Anne Gardner

Attendees Tuesday - 3/2 at 6:30pm

Jonathan Oppenheimer and family
Heather Quinn
Kate Mudge
Michael-Jon Pease
Erin Sutton
Matt Privratsky
Faith Dietz
Jessica Kopp
Alec Armon
Liz Hixson
Anne Gardner

This document shall serve as the official record of the community meeting and information shared. If additions or modifications are required, please contact Liz Hixson via email liz.hixson@ci.stpaul.mn.us by March 18, 2021

Meeting presented by Liz Hixson, project manager for Hamline Play Area 2021 Improvements and moderated by Anne Gardner, Lead Landscape Architect, with City of Saint Paul Department of Parks & Recreation – Design and Construction division.

Thank you to Jonathan Oppenheimer from Friends of Hamline Park, who organized community members to inform this process, and Alec Armon from Hamline Midway Coalition who assisted with meeting coordination.

The purpose of this meeting was to share information about the forthcoming improvements for Hamline Park, provide an update on the project status, summarize feedback received to date, and share images of the new play equipment. The agenda also included time for the community to ask questions about the park design, construction timeline, and project details.

Project Overview

The City has funding from a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for this project. The playground was last updated in 1992, making it 29 years old. This construction project will replace the play equipment and safety surfacing and enhance wheelchair access to the playground. If money remains, other areas of the park can be addressed. The construction budget is \$256,000.

City staff studied the existing park and noted issues identified by the community. The asphalt pathways are aged and need patching or repair in places. Benches, picnic tables, and the existing grill are functioning but are toward the end of their lifespan. A stronger buffer between the play area and Lafond Avenue (to



the north) is needed. Three trees are identified as in poor health and needing removal. The City also noted the presence of a wall and fence protecting park users from heavy traffic on Snelling Avenue, and a fence near the basketball court and small backboard along Thomas Ave.

The construction project will focus on the area within the red dashed line identified on the existing conditions plan. A path connection from the Hamline Recreation Center to the playground is labeled as "new pavement" This project will re-surface the path to provide improved wheelchair and walking access.

The playground concrete border will be kept, and the old rubber will be removed and replaced with new safety surfacing. Sand will be removed and replaced with engineered wood fiber (specialty wood chips designed for use in play areas).

A community group received a grant for a new gathering area within the park, and St. Paul Parks will work with the community to implement that. A picnic table, concrete pad, and barbecue grill is anticipated to be placed between the basketball court and futsal/mini-soccer court.

Process to Date

A timeline summary of work to date indicates the following key dates:

- Funding was released in July 2020, which is when the design process began
- Community group meetings were held in September and October 2020
- Two surveys about this park have been shared, the first survey was in August 2020 and results are on the Hamline Midway Coalition's website. The second survey asked for community preferences about the park as a whole, and asked for specific feedback about colors and equipment pieces for the new playground. That second survey is summarized below.

Project Goals

- Replace play equipment with fun, safe, new play structures
- Upgrade wheelchair access to play equipment
- Re-use existing play container, enhance safety surfacing
- Upgrade other areas of the park with remaining money
- Add Public Art utilizing Art Ordinance
- Record additional wishes for the park and identify funding

The project goals were shown over a view of the existing playground. The next slide shows the new play equipment, which will create a revitalized space for play and gathering. It will provide a colorful, new, safe playground that offers more play value with exciting pieces such as the worm hole and other new climbers.

Online Survey Feedback

The City shared an online survey which was available in December 2020, it was open for 2 weeks and received 71 responses. The online survey results influenced the play equipment and helped the City to understand other wishes the community has for this park.

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Most responses ranked the playground as their favorite part of the park (81%). The historic recreation center building was second (56%), and in third were the seating and benches (53%).

The survey asked for preferences on adding an amenity to the park. About 66% wanted a picnic pavilion or shade structure, and the same percentage wanted a pollinator or rain garden. About 45% wanted a community garden, and 42% indicated a need for more wheelchair-accessible play equipment

Regarding public art, the survey asked what type of art is desired in the park. About half of survey takers wrote an answer. Responses included murals, mosaics, sculpture, and many emphasized wanting the artist to be local. To this end the City is working with a community group on a process to determine what public art will be added, and we will provide more details on this in the coming months. This park has various public art pieces including a sculpture, mosaic planters, and pavement painting. Some responses also noted that banners, sidewalk poems, or more flowers were desired.

For park areas needing improvement, 66% indicated a need for more or better lighting. The next closest area for improvement was benches at about 34%. The funding for this project is focused on the play equipment but the City is keeping a record of other items such as lighting and will work to identify funding for future enhancements. The City has also heard the existing metal fence, sign posts, and benches, are important to the community and the planting beds are cared for by neighbors, we are looking into how we can address these areas.

The survey also asked what is an identifying feature of this area, and many respondents noted the diversity and community, also noted the Recreation Center building, presence of families, and the basketball court.

The survey also asked for preferences regarding playground colors. Sky blue was picked for the large plastic pieces (28%), which includes slides and the worm hole climber. Light green was selected for the guardrails (24%).

Regarding play surface, most voted for a mixture of wood fiber and some rubber (38%). The City will work with the playground installers to get the best surface that meets all safety and access requirements.

The survey asked for preferences on specific climbers to access the play equipment. The frog was selected by 59% of responses for the 2 to 5 year climber, in second and third place were the inch worm (56%) and box turtle (44%).

The Vine climber was added to the project based on receiving the most votes, as was the conifer climber. The rock climbing equipment (olympus climber and vertical climber) were third most popular in the votes, and therefore the park will have one similar feature.



Next the presentation showed images of the playground improvements. The images show views of what the new play structures look like from different angles. First is a bird's eye view, as if up in a tree looking down toward the new playground. The 2 to 5 year old structure - geared toward younger users is at bottom left. On that structure, the worm hole is at left, frog climber at right.

The next image showed a bird's eye view of the 5-12 year old equipment, intended for slightly older users. The wheelchair ramp access is shown toward the bottom right, and the structure has 4 different slides.

The playground will include new swings. This includes 2 adult / belt swings, one bucket swing for younger children, and an accessible swing for younger children. Toward the back corner is a new "nest swing" similar to a tire swing.

Construction Timeline

The City will work with the neighborhood to finalize the community gathering area
The City anticipates construction to start in early spring, weather permitting
The play area will be roped off with caution tape and old equipment removed
The City expects the area to be closed for 3 months

St. Paul Parks is working with the neighborhood art group (Hamline Midway Coalition Art Working Group) to determine public art and timeline.

Before construction begins, the City will notify the community groups involved thus far and put an update on the city project webpage.

Question and Answer Summary

Will there be access to an electrical outlet in the park, for music in the parks or other outdoor events?

- City staff will check, this is not in our current plans

Little Africa Festival is a larger event scheduled for August 7-8 at the park

- City staff plan for construction to be complete by then but will keep this in mind

More details about public art and timeline for that

- City staff recently started conversations with the Hamline Midway Coalition's Public Art Working Group, the art will be installed later than the play equipment, on a separate timeline. The Public Art Working Group will assist with finding a local artist and in determining the type of art and scope

What about that community gathering area (picnic tables and barbecue), where would it go and what is the timeline?

- The gathering area is planned to be installed at the same time as the play equipment, and will include a concrete pad, picnic table, and barbecue grill. If funds remain the project might be



able to enhance the existing picnic table with a new table and seats, or replace the existing grill (perhaps keeping the existing posts). City staff will assess this possibility as construction gets closer.

Shade structure was mentioned in the survey results, but one is not in current scope. If the community still wants to pursue this, how might we work with the City?

- To build anything on City property requires permission and an agreement, and proper permits. Using part of a larger grant, city staff coordinated installation of a shade structure at Midway Peace Park. The whole process cost around \$50,000 and approvals took a while. The City requires a structure to be commercial grade and of sturdy materials that do not require significant upkeep. City staff can work with a neighborhood group to do this but would need a grant or to identify funding.

In the images of the new play equipment, what is the tan color on the ground? Happy to hear it is not sand.

- The tan color is the wood chips or "engineered wood fiber," a popular safety surfacing that St. Paul Parks uses in other playgrounds.

Will the construction project enhance the buffer between the play area and north to Lafond Ave?

- The City can study how to do this within the project budget. St. Paul Parks is confident that the fence toward Snelling and the fence toward Thomas provide protection in the most critical areas.

"I can't tell you how this will transform our community. We were just at the park yesterday playing on the equipment in the snow! Thanks again! More children and family will be drawn to this dynamic public space!!! Perhaps post a few signs saying where other public parks are located during construction? It will be hard for folks who don't have transportation to not have the equipment"

- Yes the City can create a map to direct people to other nearby play areas and parks

"We've lived two blocks from Hamline Park for 15 years, and our children are very excited for this update. Thankful our younger children will have an opportunity to enjoy it."